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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: GUL ENCOURAGES ASAD ON USG OVERTURES

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Gul and Syrian President Asad discussed regional and bilateral economic issues during the former's May 15-17 Damascus visit, according to an MFA readout. Gul encouraged Asad to take seriously President Obama's overtures for improved US-Syria relations, as the window of opportunity for rapprochement with Washington is rapidly closing. Asad reportedly agreed in principle, but said Damascus is not yet ready to make any commitments. On the Israel-Syria talks, both leaders agreed that the process should resume as soon as possible from the point where it left off in December. Gul agreed with Asad that Iran has the right to pursue peaceful nuclear energy, but only with the full cooperation of the international community. FM Davutoglu will return to Damascus for the OIC Foreign Ministerial, May 23-25, and is expected to continue discussions with the SARG on the Israel-Syria indirect talks. End Summary

¶2. (C) President Gul and a delegation consisting of FM Davutoglu, Culture and Tourism Minister Gunay, State Minister for Foreign Trade Caglyan, Agriculture Minister Eker, and over 100 Turkish businessmen discussed regional and economic issues during a May 15-17 trip to Damascus and Aleppo, MFA Levant desk officer Ceyhun Erciyes told us. The GOT and SARG signed two agreements, a technical and cooperation agreement concerning expanding Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) activities in Syria and an MOU for cooperation in the field of housing and construction. Erciyes noted that the GOT had hoped to sign a tourism agreement, but was unable to finalize negotiations prior to the visit.

¶3. (C) During both tete-a-tete and delegation meetings, Gul and President Asad discussed U.S.-Syria relations, Israel-Syria indirect talks, Iran, and Iraq. Erciyes told us that Gul pushed Asad to respond positively to President Obama's overtures and take concrete steps to demonstrate the SARG's willingness to work with Washington. Now is a critical time and the window of opportunity is rapidly closing, Gul stressed. Asad reportedly agreed in principle, but noted that Syria is still considering the issue and is not ready to make any commitments. Asad urged Turkey to facilitate ties between Damascus and Washington, acting as an intermediary as necessary.

¶4. (C) As Gul and Asad stated in their joint press conference, the leaders spoke about resuming the Israel-Syria indirect talks. Asad stated that the SARG is ready to resume the process once Israel puts forth an interlocutor. However, Tel Aviv has given no indication that it is ready, or even interested, to return to the table.

Asad and Gul agreed that the next talks should pick up from where the December round left off. Asad also voiced support for a Turkish role in the greater Middle East peace process. He adamantly insisted that the U.S. must remain involved in the MEPP if there is to be peace in the region.

¶5. (C) Asad told Gul that Iran has a right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy, with the caveat that international experts be able to monitor the Iran's enrichment process. To that end, all interested parties should work together to "overcome the current problems." Gul agreed that Tehran should be able to continue its enrichment program, but "passionately" asserted that it should only be pursued in full cooperation with the international community, according to Gunay. Asad welcomed Iraq's successful local elections and repeated support for a strong central government in Baghdad. Gul commented that all of Iraq's neighbors should work together to support its territorial integrity. Both leaders expressed support for increased bilateral trade and committed to expanding the economic relationship.

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